Basic Facts about German

• Spoken by 90+ million (L1 speakers)
• Majority of speakers in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland
• (co-) official language of these countries plus Belgium, Luxembourg and Liechtenstein
• Most widely spoken native language in the EU
• 2nd behind English as most spoken Germanic language
Early Historic Period

• Before the fall of Rome, Germanic tribes rivaled, eventually surpassing, Celts in mobility
  • Celts were pushed westward, while Germanic tribes spread across the continent, along the northern border of the Roman Empire

• Invasions of Goths, Burgundians, Vandals, and Franks
  • Impact on Romance languages: Burgundy, Guerra/guerre < *werra,
Germanic Branch
Phonological System of Proto-Germanic

• Comparative Indo-European Linguistics breakthrough: Grimm’s Law (a.k.a. the First Germanic Sound Shift)
  • i. PIE voiceless stops become voiceless fricatives
  • ii. PIE voiced stops become voiceless stops
  • iii. PIE voiced apsirates become voiced stops or fricatives (depending on context of occurrence)
Phonological System of Proto-Germanic

**Grimm’s Law:** Chain shift of the three series of plosives. Voiced plosives had already been devoiced before a voiceless obstruent prior to this stage. Labiovelars were delabialised before /ɪ/.

- Voiceless plosives become fricatives, unless preceded by another obstruent. In a sequence of two voiceless obstruents, the second obstruent remains a plosive.
  - /p/ > /f/ (f) — *phātēr* "father" > *fātēr* > *fathēr*
  - /t/ > /θ/ (θ) — *tōd* "that" > *θod* > *θat*
  - /k/ > /kʰ/ (kʰ) — *kátus* "light" > *kʰāpus* > *hāpus*; *hnege-* "axe" > (devoicing) *aks- > *ahs- > *anhō*
  - /kʰ/ > /kʰ/ (hw) — *kʰrods* "what" > *hrods* > *hwat*
  - Since the second of two obstruents is unaffected, the sequences /spl/, /sɛl/, /skw/ /tł/ (only in "atta "dad") remain.

- The above also forms the Germanic spirant law:
  - /b/ > /β/; /d/ > /d/; /p/ > /f/ — *kฮptōs* "grabbed" > *kəptōs* > *kəntōs* > *kantōz* "captive"
  - /g/ > /ɡ/; /k/ > /k/; /t/ > /t/ — *oktōw* "eight" > *oktōw* > *antōw*
  - /gʰ/ > /ɡʰ/; /kʰ/ > /kʰ/; /tʰ/ > /tʰ/ — *noktʰrən* "night, acc." > *noktum* > *nohtum* > *nahtū*

- Voiced plosives are devoiced:
  - /b/ > /p/ — *dweuũ* "deep" > *dweupu- > *deuwpu- > *deupaz (reformed as a-stem)*
  - /d/ > /t/ — *nukōntrōn* "tooth, acc." > *tōnpum*; *kʰvōd* "what" > *hvod* > *hwat*
  - /ɡ/ > /k/ — *wērgom* "work" > *wērkom* > *wereką*
  - /ɡʰ/ > /kʰ/ — *gʰemêp* *(s)he will step, subj.* > *kmêmêp* > *(s)he comes"

- Aspirated plosives become voiced plosives or fricatives (see below):
  - /bʰ/ > /b/ ([b,b]) — *bêrēti* *(s)he is carrying" > *bērēp* > *bindi*
  - /dʰ/ > /d/ ([d,d]) — *ðōhūmōs* "thing put" > *dōmos* > *dômaz "judgement"
  - /ɡʰ/ > /ɡ/ ([ɡ,ɡ]) — *gʰâns* "goose" > *gâns* > *gans*
  - /ɡʰ/ > /ɡ/ ([ɡ,ɡ]) — *sôngíos* "chant" > *sôngíos* > *sangwaz "song"
Phonological system of German

- 20 consonant phonemes
- 14 monophthong vowels and 3 diphthongs
  - 7 pairs of short vs long monophthongs
- 2nd Germanic consonant shift
## Phonological system of German

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Germanic &gt; OHG</th>
<th>Examples (Modern German)</th>
<th>Century</th>
<th>Geographical extent</th>
<th>Standard German</th>
<th>Luxembourghish</th>
<th>Standard Dutch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>G: ɓi &gt; /p/</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>/pi &gt; /f/</td>
<td>schliefen, Schiff&lt;br&gt;cf. sleep, ship, Dutch slapen, schip, Norwegian slaapre ar (relax), skip</td>
<td>4/5</td>
<td>Upper and Central German</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>/pi &gt; /p/</td>
<td>Pfiff, Apfel, Pfest, Pfunt, schonfr ¹&lt;br&gt;cf. ploeg, appel, path, pool, sharp, Dutch ploeg, appel, pad, pool, soer, Norwegian ploeg, opie, scrape</td>
<td>6/7</td>
<td>Upper German</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G: ɓi &gt; /p/</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>/çi &gt; /ss/</td>
<td>ossen, ossis, jus ⁵&lt;br&gt;cf. eat, that, out, Dutch eten, dat, uit, Norwegian eite, det, ut</td>
<td>4/5</td>
<td>Upper and Central German</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>/çi &gt; /z/</td>
<td>Ziez, Zwei, Zehn&lt;br&gt;cf. tide, two, toe, Dutch tijd, twee, trek, Norwegian tid, to, tå</td>
<td>5/6</td>
<td>Upper and Central German</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G: ɓi &gt; /p/</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>/gi &gt; /h/</td>
<td>machen, brechen, ich&lt;br&gt;cf. make, break, i Dutch maken, breken, ik ⁷</td>
<td>5/6</td>
<td>Upper and Central German</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>/gi &gt; /hg/</td>
<td>Bavarian: Kohend&lt;br&gt;cf. German Kind, Dutch kind, child ⁷</td>
<td>7/8</td>
<td>Southernmost Austro-Bavarian and High Alemnic</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G: ɓi &gt; [b]</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>/b/ &gt; /b/</td>
<td>geben, web&lt;br&gt;cf. give, wife, Dutch geven, wijf</td>
<td>7/8</td>
<td>Upper German and some varieties of Central German</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>/b/ &gt; [b]</td>
<td>gjet, English good, Dutch goed, Norwegian god, Icelandic gjetur</td>
<td>2-4</td>
<td>Throughout West Germanic</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G: ɓi &gt; /i/</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>/i/ &gt; /ɪ/</td>
<td>gut&lt;br&gt;cf. Dutch goed</td>
<td>7/8</td>
<td>Upper German and some varieties of Central German</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Partly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>/i/ &gt; /i/</td>
<td>Bavarian: prig, prist&lt;br&gt;cf. German Berg “hill”, Irid “you are”; German Rippe&lt;br&gt;cf. English rib</td>
<td>8/9</td>
<td>Parts of Bavarian/Alemnic, other Upper German only for gernimates</td>
<td>Partly</td>
<td>Partly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G: ɓi &gt; [b]</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>/d/ &gt; /d/</td>
<td>Tag, bitte, Vater&lt;br&gt;cf. day, middel, Dutch Dag, Middel, Vader “father” ⁸</td>
<td>8/9</td>
<td>Upper German</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>/d/ &gt; /d/</td>
<td>Bavarian: Kof&lt;br&gt;cf. German Gott “God”, German Brücke&lt;br&gt;cf. English bridge, Dutch brug</td>
<td>8/9</td>
<td>Parts of Bavarian/Alemnic; other Upper German only for gernimates</td>
<td>Partly</td>
<td>Partly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G: ɓi &gt; /b/</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>/b/ &gt; /o/ &gt; /d/</td>
<td>Donn, Dost, durch; Bruder&lt;br&gt;cf. thorn, thistle, through, brother</td>
<td>9/10</td>
<td>Throughout continental West Germanic</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Phonological system of German

From the Parisian Gloses:
17. Guane cumet ger, brothro?
20. Gueliche lande cumen ger?
42. Vndeis ars in tine naso.
46. E guille than uthz rite.
51. Gimer min ros.
52. Gimer min schelt.
53. Gimer min spera, spata.

54. Gimer min suarda.
65. Coorestu, narra.
77. Gued est taz?
79. Buozze mine sco.
98. Hiih ast heuttu flees.
Grammatical Features

• Fusional language with 4-case system of declension
• 3 genders – masculine, feminine & neuter
• 2 numbers – singular and plural
• Strong and Weak verb
• 2 tenses without auxiliary verbs – present and preterite
  • 4 tenses with auxiliary – perfect, pluperfect, future, future perfect
The Continuum

• Conventionally grouped into Upper, Central and Low German

• Connects German varieties to neighboring Dutch and Frisian language realms
The Continuum

Deutsche Dialekte 1910

Nordsee

Ostsee

The map illustrates the distribution of German dialects in 1910, with regions colored according to different dialect groups.
Contact-induced changes over time

- German diaspora
Contact-induced changes over time

• America
  • Texas German
  • Pennsylvania Dutch (German)
  • Pockets of the Mid-West
Contact-induced changes over time

• Brazilian German
  • Ca. 3 million Riogrundenser Hunsrückisch, 1.5 million Standard German, and 8,000 Plautdietsch

• Colonial legacy
  • South Africa – 12,000 speaker-community: “commonly used language”
  • Namibia – German official language status from 1984 until independence in 1990 from South Africa
References


https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_dialects

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Germanic_languages